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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000918

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [IQ](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: DEPOSED TYRE SHIA MUFTI PROPOSES FORMING  
MODERATE SHIA LEAGUE

REF: A. BEIRUT 710  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 912  
[1](#)C. BEIRUT 608

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) On June 19, Charge and visiting S/P advisor met deposed Shia Mufti of Tyre Sayyed Ali al-Amin, who remains in Beirut after Hizballah drove him out of his position during the May clashes. Al-Amin described the lack of support from Iraqi Shia, whom he describes as afraid to confront Iranian influence in Iraq. Amin lamented that it was unlikely there would be alternative, independent Shia representation in the new Lebanese cabinet. Instead, he said, there will likely be Shia representation only through Shia parties Hizballah and Amal. Noting that the efforts of Lebanese independent, moderate Shia are "ineffective and disparate," Amin proposed forming a "Shia League" composed of clerics, businessmen, and others who share a moderate religious ideology. This coalition is important, he said, because "you cannot fight Hizballah with prayers alone." End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 19, the Charge met with Sayyed Ali al-Amin, the deposed Shia mufti of Tyre and the Jebel Aamel district at his apartment in Beirut, where he has been staying since his office was ransacked by Hizballah during the May clashes (Ref A). Visiting Policy Planning staff member Jared Cohen, PolOffs, Shia Sheikh Maarouf Rahal, and Amin's son, Sayyed Hassan al-Amin also attended the meeting.

&WHERE ARE THE MODERATES?8  
IRAQI SHIA CANNOT CONFRONT IRAN  
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[1](#)3. (C) Expressing his disgust for the demonstration levied against the Charge and independent Shia activist Abdullah Bitar by Hizballah supporters June 18 in Nabatieh in southern Lebanon (Ref B), Amin called the Charge's trip a &breakthrough into the fiefdom of Hizballah.8 He noted that he had been lobbying without success with the GOL,s ministers to make similar visits to southern Lebanon, adding that they instead rely on others to carry out this work and had not yet visited Hizballah-controlled areas.

[1](#)4. (C) Relaying that Hizballah continues to occupy his office in Tyre, Amin declared that he is &ready to pay the price, but where are the other moderate voices?8 He said that some moderate Shia from Iraq, the UK, Australia, and

inside of Lebanon telephoned him to express their support, but added that the religious clerics in Iraq remained quiet, presumably because of their ties to Iran.

¶15. (C) Hamed Khafaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, representative in Lebanon, had not contacted him after he was threatened in Tyre, Amin said. According to Amin, Sistani funds Hizballah and Amal Movement. Amin told us he is friends with Jawad Sistani, the Grand Ayatollah, son-in-law, who is responsible for Sistani's financial transactions, but that they do not share political views.

¶16. (C) Mentioning that he had received an Iraqi religious figure the previous day, Amin assessed that Iraqi Shia do not have the courage to publicly confront Iran, &which has a big influence in Iraq.8 He continued, &neither the Iraqi religious authority nor the government can protect the Iraqi Shia.8

¶17. (C) He criticized Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (who &wears a suit by day and military gear by night8) for excluding the Shia moderates from participating in the new cabinet and for ensuring that Hizballah is the sole representative for Shia. Amin recommended that a moderate like MP Bassem Sabaa, a Shia who belongs to Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, be appointed a minister, admitting that this was unlikely.

#### PLANS TO BUILD A COALITION OF SHIA

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¶18. (C) Acknowledging that he is only able to communicate with his supporters in Tyre via the telephone, Amin said he is looking for office space in Beirut. He told us that the number of Lebanese Shia speaking against Hizballah is increasing, including students, who form a close community through their schools. Amin proposed forming an independent &Shia League8 composed of moderate clerics and civilians, similar to the existing Maronite League.

¶19. (C) Because there are many &ineffective, disparate efforts,8 Amin envisions a consolidated group based upon a shared religious ideology. He noted the timing is important because prior to the July 2006 war, it was not possible for a group such as the proposed "Shia League" to take a position against Hizballah, but since then, it is more likely. Amin noted that he would need resources for the center because &you cannot confront Hizballah by prayers alone.8 He also mentioned that he had proposed the creation and funding of a satellite television network highlighting moderate Shia views.

#### COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Amin appeared resolute, strong, and prepared for what lies ahead, despite having witnessed a gun held to a family member's head during the May clashes in Tyre and having to have his family moved into hiding in the Chouf Mountains (Druze area) for several weeks. Amin repeated a sentiment he had shared with us during our May 4 meeting (Ref C): "he who is afraid is of no help to me." Amin's courage was certainly tested in May, and he seems to have emerged from the experience with even greater determination and courage. In the May meeting, he had spoken in more abstract terms regarding the empowerment of moderate Shia clergy and providing social services in the south. In contrast, on June 19, Amin's proposals to establish a new office as well as to form a Shia League were concrete, practical, and stated with great urgency. Amin did not label this effort as a rival to the official Higher Islamic Shia Council, but it may be viewed by Amal and Hizballah as such. As a footnote, much to our surprise, Actint Higher Islamic Shia Council head Abdel Amir Qabalan telephoned June 20 to denounce the Nabotieh

incident and declared that it was "not the tradition of the  
Lebanese Shia to hurt others." End Comment.  
SISON